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RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0687
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0128
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0784
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1273
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2577
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, INR, DRL, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA;
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICAWATCHERS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHAD: REBEL CONVOY BLOODIED LESS THAN 100 MILES
FROM NDJAMENA

1. (SBU) Summary: A rebel convoy of perhaps 40 vehicles moved to within less than 100 miles southeast of Ndjamena. According to the French Ambassador, Chadian armed forces engaged the convoy and largely destroyed it. A larger military threat may be looming on the eastern border. The French are concerned enough to have brought in reinforcements, closed their school, and kept people at home for the night. The American Embassy community has consolidated for the time being into the Embassy and one large residential compound. Ndjamena is quieter than usual.
End Summary.

2. (SBU) Various sources, including French Ambassador Bercot and the Chadian Chief of Staff, have provided predictably divergent information but tend to agree that a rebel group managed to get across a considerable distance from the border with Central African Republic and reach the town of Massenya 100 miles from Ndjamena. Bercot as of late afternoon said that the group had an estimated 40 vehicles (down from the 50-60 he had cited early in the day) which had passed through or around Massenya and had stopped before Dourbali between Ndjamena and Massenya. Two of the vehicles had been destroyed by the one functioning Chadian helicopter (now repaired after being downed at Adre in December). The Chadian Chief of Staff, also late this afternoon, told DATT that the rebels were in Massenya, while the Chadian armed forces were in Dourbali with 40-50 vehicles, significantly better armed than the rebels. He acknowledged that the rebels had got much further than he would have expected but nonetheless characterized their romp across Chad as a "suicide mission." They held no towns or territory. Earlier reports that some of the rebels had gone further north, to Ati and Karame, were baseless. He claimed the helicopter had succeeded in knocking out five vehicles.

3. (SBU) At 18:45 Bercot told Ambassador Wall that the Chadian armed forces had engaged this convoy and largely (80 percent) destroyed it. What remained of the group, he said, was scattered groups of two or three vehicles, without logistical support.

4. (SBU) No one knows the precise make-up of this rebel convoy. Bercot spoke of a "Mexican salad" of various groups loosely allied in the "FUC," including elements from Mahamat Nour's RDL, Zaghawa elements associated with Abakar Tolli and

the Erdimi twins, Chadian deserters in the Central African Republic, the "Arab Legion," and Southern rebels under Djibrine Dassert. However, he believed that Nour's main force remained at or on the other side of the Sudanese border, poised to act as a "rolling convoy" depending on success of the present foray. He said that an attack by Nour's RDL had been repulsed in the past day or two in the area of Tizi, near the juncture of the Chad, Sudan, and CAR borders. Comment: It is likely that these various rebel groups were in close contact by satellite telephone over the past weeks and managed to converge. They may have had "sleeper cells" present along their route. End Comment.

¶5. (SBU) To Ambassador Wall's question to Bercot what the French planned to do militarily, Bercot was noncommittal, except to emphasize that the French military would prevent harm to international interests and that his first priority was reinforcing the points where French and foreign nationals are concentrated (such as the French School). (We understand that the French military in Chad has been reinforced by 150 men, bringing the total to nearly 1500.) Bercot had spoken to President Deby in the afternoon and Deby warned, "They (the rebels) will see (what is in store for them)!" At 18:45, Bercot said that Deby was feeling much more confident than he had been the previous day.

¶6. (SBU) Bercot said that he had advised French citizens not to circulate more than absolutely necessary during the day and stay indoors after dark. The French School opened in the morning, then closed; Bercot told Ambassador Wall that he had planned to keep the school closed tomorrow.

¶5. (SBU) Ndjamena is quiet -- quieter than normal. Predictably, many Western-oriented restaurants are closed. Chadian soldiers are posted up and down the main street where

the presidential palace and many government buildings are located. The Embassy has consolidated its personnel for the time being in the Embassy and in a compound that includes several residences and the American School around a common courtyard.

WALL